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# SPECTATORS OF OUR RACE

An Account of the Alamance Presbyterian Church

Scripture: Selections from Hebrews 11:1 - 12:2

By Rev. Ben F. Brown, Th.D.\*

The picture here is a race in a great stadium or amphitheatre which is filled with spectators. These people are not idly passing away an afternoon watching a game, nor are they there to heap praise upon some individual star of the day. The spectators are really a part of the team -- interested and eager participants. It is a kind of relay race in which they have run their laps and have passed the torch on to others. It is their race and they win or lose as the present runners gain victory or go down in defeat.

Early this year the Saturday Evening Post carried a story about the track star, Jim Beatty, the North Carolinian who became the first man to break the four-minute mile in an indoor meet. He was quoted as saying:

"It's a thrill at the indoor races, particularly Madison Square Garden, to stand there and think of all the great sporting events that have been held right where you're standing and to be an important part of one ... I love rolling off a curve and turning it on down a short straightaway. I love hearing the people right on top of me, being able to see their faces and hearing that tremendous crowd noise."

He, too, was conscious of all who had performed before and of those who were encouraging him in the race. As we gather on this 150th Anniversary, we cannot but be conscious of all those who have played their part in the years before. Surely today we are surrounded with a great crowd of spectators who are a part of our continuing race. At this time we will be thinking of some who have been connected with this church. Not because they are unique or because this church is different, but simply because you are here today. You honor us with your presence as you did 50 years ago and 150 years ago. What we say about this church is typical of what

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\* Minister of the Alamance Presbyterian Church, Greensboro, N. C., 1957--  
This address was delivered at 9 a.m., Wednesday, June 12, 1963, in the Alamance Church, on the occasion of the (second day) of the Sesqui-Centennial Meeting of the Synod of North Carolina, Presbyterian Church in the United States.

might be said about any number of the old churches of our Synod, their pastors and people.

Two hundred and one years ago a group of Scotch-Irish settlers met on the knoll above the curve in the road just north of this building to erect a house of worship. Before striking a blow one of the men, Andrew Finley, proposed that prayer should be offered for the Divine blessing to attend their endeavors. As all knelt under an oak, Mr. Finley led in prayer and dedicated these grounds to Almighty God as a place of public worship forever. They then proceeded to erect a log-house of worship.

The second building, with a seating capacity of 1,000, and known as the "Old Yellow Church," was in use in 1813 when the Synod of North Carolina was formed here. Orange Presbytery, which covered about half the state at that time, met here nine times in 13 years at the beginning of the 19th century. Apparently the meeting of Synod and frequent meetings of Presbytery were due to the central location and the large church building.

What later came to be Guilford County proved to be most attractive to the early settlers. In addition to the Scotch-Irish, the Germans came and settled just east of here and established Reformed and Lutheran Churches, and the Quakers or Friends settled to the west side of Greensboro in the area of Guilford College. Some sturdy Scotch-Irish were not willing, however, to settle east of Jordan but crossed over and conquered and settled the Promised Land. They established seven churches in the Mecklenburg area and claimed it all for the Presbyterians. So thoroughly did they succeed that just a few years ago when I entered a public school near my home in the Steele Creek community, there was only one family represented in that school that was not Presbyterian.

The first deed to land in this immediate section dates back to 1753. Most of the earlier settlers were north of here and centered around the Buffalo Church, which was organized eight years before Alamance. Worship services were conducted here for two years without a formal organization. In 1764 the Reverend Henry Patillo, pastor



of the Hawfields and other churches 35-40 miles east of here, led in the organization of this church. Henry Patillo had plenty to do in the Haw River and Hillsboro areas. Transportation was slow. But he took the time to minister to the scattered people of this area and helped them to establish a church. To do a comparable work today, a minister would have to travel 200 miles from home and attempt to give pastoral leadership to people scattered over two or three counties. What minister or congregation in the Greensboro area today would think of becoming personally involved with the spiritual needs of people in Richmond, Asheville, or Wilmington? Surely Henry Patillo and others like him give us a lesson in Church Extension.

Soon after the church was organized, the Alamance Congregation united with the Buffalo Congregation in calling for the services of licentiate David Caldwell of Pennsylvania, whom many of the settlers knew before migrating to the piedmont of North Carolina. His ministry as licentiate and ordained pastor covered a period of nearly 60 years. PROJECT 150 devoted one of its four radio programs to "The Remarkable Doctor of Guilford." Truly he was a remarkable and great man. He could be called the Albert Schweitzer of another century. As he visited among his people, he saw the terrible diseases and witnessed the many early deaths which seemed to be an unavoidable part of frontier life. The conviction grew that he should minister to their bodies as well as their spirits. He studied medicine and became the first medical doctor of the region. No schools were available for the youth. He began his own school, called the Caldwell Institute, and popularly known later as the "Log College." Taking young men from the rude log cabins and primitive ways of life, he sent them out to be leaders of states, institutions, business, and of a free society. Eli Caruthers, his biographer, writes: "Five of his scholars became Governors of different states, many more members of Congress...and a much greater number became lawyers, judges, physicians and ministers of the Gospel." It is estimated that he prepared over 50 men for the ministry. In one session Orange Presbytery licensed or ordained seven men who had received their training under him.

David Caldwell followed the One who is the Truth and who said: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." In his preaching he magnified the dignity of the human personality and the God-given rights of men. At first he was utterly opposed to armed rebellion but his preaching, together with that of his father-in-law, Alexander Craighead of Mecklenburg, Henry Patillo and many others, inevitably led to the Regulators, the Battle of Alamance, and the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. David Caldwell was the leading patriot of this area and the British Forces sought his life. He was successful in hiding out, but they did destroy his property and burn all his books and papers, including the early records of this church. He served, along with Elder Ralph Gorrell, in the Convention of 1776 which drew up our first State Constitution. He was a preacher, teacher, doctor, and patriot, but apparently received so little for his services that he had to operate a large farm to care for his needs and those of his dependents. This remarkable man sought to meet the total needs of his people. He was not content simply to preach the Gospel. He ministered to their bodies, he educated their minds, and was a leading force in community life. When we quote from "the fathers" about the spirituality of the church, should we go back 100 years or 200 years?

Eli W. Caruthers was the second pastor of this church and after 40 years of faithful service he was asked by the congregation to resign. He was born ahead of his time. In the days when our "founding fathers" were proving by Scripture the rightfulness of slavery, this man was being led by the Spirit to prove the opposite. Dr. Harold J. Dudley tells me that there is a long original manuscript, perhaps 250 handwritten pages, by Dr. Caruthers in the Duke Library (why it is there is not known) in which he proved by Scripture that slavery was wrong. He didn't publish this paper because he knew the people of that day were not ready for it. But he stuck to his convictions. One Sunday morning, soon after the outbreak of the War Between the States, he prayed for the young men of the congregation who were away fighting but not for their "lost cause." He was asked to resign. But the people respected him and continued to love



him. He was buried in this cemetery and his memory was honored by a marble slab attached to the wall of the church. This memorial, one to David Caldwell, and others may be seen in our historical room. Again, as we search for our roots, let us not overlook one like Eli Caruthers, not considered a "founding father" but who was a faithful searcher after truth and who was willing to stand for his convictions.

Turning from the pastors, let us look at a product of the church. Calvin H. Wiley was reared in this church and community. His old home is still in use today. He served faithfully as an elder in this church for many years. He became the first State Superintendent of Common Schools (Public Instruction) and served for seven successive terms. While serving here as an elder and as State Superintendent of Public Instruction, he was licensed in 1855 by Orange Presbytery to preach the Gospel. He was ordained by Orange Presbytery following the war and for a period served here as supply minister. He gave many of his remaining years as a district representative of the American Bible Society. Calvin H. Wiley, educated at the Caldwell Institute, an educator in his own right who made a significant contribution to the educational life of this state, a minister and distributor of the Word of God, is one of whom this church is proud.

David C. Rankin, another son of the church, served as principal of the General Assembly's Institute (now Stillman College) for the training of Negro ministers at Tuscaloosa, Ala. He later served as Associate Secretary of the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions and for 13 years as editor of the church's foreign missionary publications. He died in Korea while on a visit to our oriental mission fields in 1902. Dr. Rankin shows the interest of the congregation in mission work and in the work of Stillman.

"And what shall I say more, for time would fail me to tell" of pastors like William B. Tidball, Cornelious Miller, who left here to become an outstanding Home Missionary of Stokes County, Ephraim C. Murray, who served here for two different pastorates and who gave three sons to the ministry -- of whom J. J. Murray of the

Synod of Virginia and Marion J. Murray of Orange Presbytery are still active, of Samuel M. Rankin, A. W. Crawford, host pastor of the Centennial Meeting of Synod, and J. M. Millard, under whose leadership for 32 years the church membership greatly increased, the total program of the church enlarged, and all existing buildings were built. He continued to live in the community following his retirement six and a half years ago until a few weeks ago when he and Mrs. Millard became residents of the Presbyterian Home at High Point. Something of his greatness is seen in the fact that after a ministry of 32 years he could prepare and lead the congregation to accept, love, and follow a new minister.

In like manner we can only mention the names of a few of the sons of the church like Col. Arthur Forbis and Col. John Paisley of Guilford Courthouse Battle fame, of John Matthews, a minister who founded the Theological Seminary of New Albany (now McCormick Seminary, Chicago), of William D. Paisley, who organized and became the first pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Greensboro, of John Finley, schoolmaster and the first superintendent of the Sunday School, of the unnamed women who organized one of the first "Female Benevolent Societies" in the Synod, the late Charles H. Phipps and J. Robert Phipps, the late Charles D. Whiteley and Gurney L. Whitely, the latter of whom was the originator of the Belmont Covenant Plan which brought new spiritual vigor into many churches and saved others from financial ruin during the depression of the 1930's, and of the living sons and daughters of the church like Charles P. Coble, honorably retired in South Carolina, James R. Phipps of Concord Presbytery, Robert L. Forbis, recent moderator of the Synod of Georgia, and Mary Ellen Hodgin Bobb (Mrs. Donald F.), a missionary to the Congo since 1953.

Andrew Finley and the others who built the first house of worship were the forerunners of many who have put God and His church first in their lives. The community has been blessed by having fine, solid Christian citizens during the years.

In addition to those who have become ministers or missionaries, many streams of spiritual influence have gone forth from this church as men and women have moved into various places throughout the entire country. Many of these have become leaders



in church, education, business, industry, and government during the years.

We must not only look to the past, we must live in the present, and plan for the future. This church looks to the future with confidence. When the present sanctuary was built in 1955, the seating capacity was not based on one-half the membership (as seems to be the rule for churches of this size) but for about 50% more than its membership at that time. About eight years ago one of the members, Mr. John W. Hobbs, gave the church approximately ten acres of land to the west and south of our cemetery. In 1960 the Guilford County School Board advertised for sale the old school property, adjacent to the manse across the road, consisting of seven acres and a brick veneer dwelling. The church did not need this property for the immediate future, but believing in the future growth and usefulness of the church, the congregation purchased the additional land and building. Presently, committees are studying the program and facilities of the church looking toward an enlarged program and additional service which will become a part of our Bi-Centennial Program next year.

At this time we extend a cordial invitation for you to be our guests for Synod's Bi-Centennial in 2013. We hope all of you will be present at that time.












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